5 Tips for Student Veterans Starting Their Undergraduate Degrees
By Peter Terrafranca

Are you angry because you were not meritoriously promoted to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff? Do you want to do better in college than you did in the military? This article will help you get your first gold star in academia.

Start writing now. In your degree program, you will inevitably write multiple essays and be asked to present your own argument about a subject. To master this skill, you must write. Start a journal, travel log, blog or email exchange with a friend. Your ideas will flow more easily onto the page as your daily word output increases.

Be vulnerable and make mistakes. The military trains us to constantly conceal our vulnerabilities and exploit the weaknesses of others. In a university, the best students are those who reveal their own weaknesses and strengthen them with the help of classmates and professors. Enter your program as a humble learner and you will undoubtedly succeed.

Engage in cross-disciplinary thinking. As Veterans, we all have specialties. You have probably heard the saying “stay in your box.” Now is the time to emerge from your box and explore how your secret passion for otter photography can make the world a better place. Be creative and search for connections between all of your classes and your future career. They can be found if you look hard enough.

Switch from problem solving to problematizing. Good scholars ask many questions and are not satisfied with simple answers, especially their own. They seek an understanding of a subject and provide possible explanations of phenomena, not concrete solutions. Avoid the trap of trying to save the world as an undergrad. There will be time for that later, and you can receive a healthy salary in exchange for your brilliant solutions.

Apply for prestigious fellowships and scholarships that can boost your career. Your military experience is the stuff that great application essays are made of. Do not be intimidated by your younger and better looking competition. Your scars are beautiful to the committees reviewing applications. Just make sure that you have followed the advice in this article and can put together a strong essay.